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I. W. Mabbett

THE SYMBOLISM OF MOUNT MERU

"The summit of the cosmic mountain is not only the highest point of the earth; it is also the earth's navel, the point at which the Creation began."[1] M. Eliade has demonstrated vividly the pervasiveness of the myth of the cosmic mountain which stands at the center of the universe, constituting a framework or coordinate system for a total cosmography. With it, layers of symbolism are mutually superimposed, for it is no mere static point: it is bedded in the mythology of ascent into the sacred and the quest for the center.[2]

In Asia, it is of course Mount Meru that bears this rich load of accumulated myth and aspiration. Nurtured by the development of Indian cosmology (and thereafter carried far and wide with the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism into most of the further corners of Asia), Mount Meru is all too commonly believed to be derived from the ziggurats of Babylon, whose seven tiers represented the seven heavenly spheres and the seven stages by which the human personality is enmeshed in the world of matter; at its top is the door of God, *Bab Ilu*.[3] The Achaemenids conquered Babylon, and their successors the

[1] M. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History*, trans. W. Trask (Princeton, N.J., 1974), p. 16.
[2] Ibid., pp. 12–17; cf. M. Eliade, *Images et symboles* (Paris, 1952).
[3] Paul Mus, *Barabudur* (Hanoi, 1935), p. 293.

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Seleucids had links with Mauryan India; the art of Aśoka's time, with its "Persepolitan" style, shows the influences from the West.[4]

That there were cultural links need not be doubted. Less certain is the content of the cosmological package often held to be transmitted by them. Since von Heine-Geldern's studies,[5] it has become commonplace to derive the cosmological notion of the cosmic mountain in further Asia specifically from the ziggurats of Mesopotamia.[6] This is open to question. According to Lambert, it is not clear that in Mesopotamian cosmology the universe was generally held to center on a cosmic peak beneath a sky-dome, a view originally fostered in part by a misleading translation by Jensen ("vault of heaven" for "heaven"), and, though there are references to a cosmic mountain in literary and poetic texts, "it is not possible to construct a precise image from them."[7] As for the seven planets and their function as a cosmic organizing principle, this developed in Babylon only late, and Vedic India was anyway well able from indigenous sources to supply rich mythological precedents for the cosmic importance of the number seven.[8]

Of course the cosmic mountain may indeed have been a significant motif in Mesopotamian culture; there is evidence suggesting it, even if the evidence has been overenthusiastically interpreted.[9] And in India after the Vedic period there may have been a Western influence upon cosmology. There is no call to deny the diffusionist theory altogether. But Paul Mus was one of the first to argue that the diffusionist interpretation should not be overdone: he emphasized the "algebraic" and "astronomical" character of the Western cosmology evidenced in Aśoka's time and insisted that the development of the tapestry of traditions surrounding Meru in India was woven essentially by native genius, with its ideas of the creation and separation of earth and heaven, the expansion of the world inflated by the divine winds, and

[4] J. Przyluski, "Le Symbolisme du Pilier de Sarnath," *Mélanges Linossier* 2:487, cited by Mus, *Barabudur*, p. 109; B. Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (Harmondsworth, 1953), pp. 65–70.

[5] R. von Heine-Geldern, "Weltbild und Bauform in Südostasien," *Wiener Beiträge zur Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Asiens* 4 (1930): 28–78, and "Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 2 (1942): 15–30, reprinted as a monograph in the Cornell University Southeast Asia Program (Ithaca, N.Y., 1956).

[6] See, e.g., H. G. Quaritch Wales, *The Mountain of God: A Study in Early Religion and Kingship* (London, 1953).

[7] W. G. Lambert, "The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon," in *Ancient Cosmologies*, ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe (London, 1975), p. 61.

[8] R. Gombrich, "Ancient Indian Cosmology," in Blacker and Loewe, eds., pp. 117–18.

[9] See W. Gaerte, "Kosmische Vorstellungen im Bilde prähistorischer Zeit: Erdberg, Himmelsberg, Erdnabel und Weitströme," *Anthropos* 9 (1914): 956–79.

so forth;[10] Meru in its incorporation into India had to be adapted to the earth and world symbolism of indigenous tradition.[11] F. D. K. Bosch, who directly criticized Heine-Geldern's "universism," objected to the "inanimacy" of the macrocosmos portrayed by it; for Bosch, it was essential to recognize that Meru was not some impersonal map reading but a vital force, full of vegetal energy; indeed, it was interchangeably identical with the tree of life or the cosmic lotus which, for him, constituted the supreme organizing principle of Indian religious symbolism.[12]

The purpose here is not to examine the history of Meru's diffusion but to give a synthetic account of its symbolism in the Indian cosmology that underlay Hinduism and Buddhism. What will emerge is that, whatever its historical origins, Mount Meru became much more than a feature on the cosmographic map. A map is a misleading metaphor, for a map is two-dimensional. Meru rose up in a third dimension; in doing so, it pierced the heavens; in piercing the heavens, it transcended time as well as space; in transcending time it became (in Mus's sense) a magical tool for the rupture of plane. This is evident in the many layers of symbolism that exchange Meru for the cosmic man, for the temple at the center of the universe, for the office of kingship, for the *stūpa*, for the maṇḍala, and for the internal ascent undertaken by the tantric mystic. Meru is not, we must recognize, a place, "out there," so to speak. It is "in here."

In the post-Vedic literature of India (there is one late Vedic allusion), and particularly in the *purāṇas*, the portrait of Meru is sketched for us from many angles. We can see an indigenous origin for the *idea* of Meru in the world pillar that separated heaven and earth. Meru, we learn, was present at the beginning of creation. Its shape and size are described in great detail; in many accounts it is broader at the summit than at the base. Many other sacred mountains stand around it, particularly four buttress mountains which establish an orientation to the magic of the compass points and the divinities that preside over them. Meru is the center of the universe, and its symmetry is vertical as well as horizontal: the cities of the gods that crown it are matched by the infernal nether regions of the *asura* demons beneath. Associated with Meru is the heavenly lake Anavatapta, whose waters are the waters of immortality; from Meru comes the river Ganges (which is caught in Śiva's braided hair on the way). The courses of the heavenly bodies are governed by Meru. The

[10] Mus, *Barabudur*, p. 109.
[11] Ibid., pp. 112–13.
[12] F. D. K. Bosch, *The Golden Germ* (The Hague, 1960), pp. 230–31.

clockwise passage of the sun around Meru is reflected by the circumambulation ritual of *pradakṣiṇā*, which defines or creates sacred space and thereby makes possible the ascent or projection from the plane of mundane life to that of the sacred.[13]

Mount Meru is of course embedded in a complex of cosmographic dispositions which are spelled out in great detail in some sources—particularly the *purāṇas* and certain Buddhist texts—but which need not be pursued here into its rococo refinements. This cosmography, however fanciful it may seem, was an attempt to understand the phenomenal world by mapping its structure. Notions of the structure's broad design underwent changes. W. Kirfel, in his painstaking compendium of Indian cosmography, still the most valuable general account,[14] seeks to distinguish successive periods in which the cosmos was articulated in four, three, and seven divisions, respectively. D. C. Sircar, in his more recent study,[15] distinguishes between an earlier period (represented by the earlier *purāṇas*) in which the world was divided into four continents, and a later (represented by the later *purāṇas*) when there were seven concentric ring-shaped continents. Buddhist cosmography represents a transition. Each Buddhist world-system is a huge disk bounded by a rim, a *cakravāla*, on which the four continents surround Mount Meru; but Meru is itself in the center of seven annular mountain ranges, *kulācalas*,[16] and obviously these *kulācalas*, with seas in between them, become continents themselves in the later system.

The continent on which we humans dwell is Jambudvīpa. It is the southernmost of the four in one system; it is the innermost of the seven in the other. In this latter system it is divided into zones, *varṣas*, of which the southernmost is Bhārata, India, and the central one is Ilāvṛta, in the middle of which rises Mount Meru. In Ilāvṛta there are no sun, moon, or stars to be seen; the inhabitants are the color of the white lotus and live to be 13,000 years old, dwelling in contentment.[17]

All these cosmographical dispositions set Meru in the center of a horizontal plane and make it a point of reference for everything around it. But there is more to Meru's symbolism than this, of course.

[13] The facts in this paragraph are amplified and documented in I. W. Mabbett, "A Sketch of Mount Meru," in *Professor Radhagovinda Basak Vidyāvācaspati Felicitation Volume*, ed. M. Banerjee, P. Bandyopadhyay, et al. (Calcutta, 1983).

[14] W. Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder* (Bonn/Leipzig, 1920).

[15] D. C. Sircar, *Cosmography and Geography in Early Indian Literature* (Calcutta, 1967), pp. 38, 48.

[16] For Buddhist cosmography, see, particularly, G. Coedès and C. Archaimbault, trans., *Les Trois Mondes* (Paris, 1973), a Thai compilation from Pali sources.

[17] Kurma Purāṇa 1.43.1–99. Cf. C. Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, eds. and trans., *Classical Hindu Mythology* (Philadelphia, 1978), pp. 52–53; Kirfel, p. 105.

It is not simply a point at the center of a circle; it is a vertical shaft which links macrocosm with microcosm, gods with men, timelessness with time. To approach Meru is to change one's spiritual state; to arrive at the top is to transcend particularities of state altogether. Buddhism elaborated a detailed account of Meru's integration with the structure of spiritual ascent. For example, a commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa* tells us that on the fourth terrace of Meru is the retinue of the Four Great Kings, the *Cāturmahārājikas*; these beings, who presumably live somewhat higher up, live for 500 years, each day of their lives being fifty human years. Halfway up Meru are the chariots of the sun, moon, and stars, and on its summit are the *Trayastriṃśa* (equivalent of the Pali *Tāvatimsa*) gods, the Thirty-three. Above them is King Śakra (the Buddhist Indra). Eighty thousand *yojanas* above the Thirty-three, and 160,000 *yojanas* above Jambudvīpa, is the palace of the Yama gods. Above them again, at specified heights, dwell successively the gods of the Tuṣita heaven, those of the *Nirmānarati* heaven, and those of the *Paranirmita* heaven.[18] These are the six divine categories of the *kāmaloka*, world of desire (below them are the categories of men, demons, ghosts, animals, and souls in hell). Above the *kāmaloka* rises the *rūpaloka*, world of form, which is divided into the four *dhyānas*, each of which is subdivided; altogether there are sixteen of these subdivisions. Above the *rūpaloka* is the *arūpaloka* where form disappears; in it, one may pass upward through the realms of infinity of space, infinity of thought, nothingness, and the absence of consciousness or non-consciousness.[19] This elaborate scheme spread where Buddhism spread. That Meru could be built into it shows that the central mountain is not just a physical entity "out there." As one ascends it and rises above it, it becomes an immaterial "in here."

Meru is a framework or coordinate system for outer space and for inner space; it is the same for time. It is a shaft that projects upward through the center of the heavens, and the movements of the heavenly bodies, which calibrate the passage of time, are plotted around it. The sun, says the Mahābhārata, revolved between rising and setting around Meru; Mount Vindhya, full of jealousy, asked the sun to honor him likewise. Sūrya replied: "I do not of my own will honour this mountain by my circumambulations. This path has been assigned

[18] See B. C. Law, *Heaven and Hell in Buddhist Perspective* (Calcutta/Simla, 1925), pp. 31–32.

[19] See, e.g., the compendium of cosmography, *Traibhūmikathā* in Coedès and Archaimbault, trans., pp. 5–6; Majjhima Nikāya 1.73; L. A. Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism* (London, 1895), pp. 83–84.

to me by that one by whom this universe was built."[20] Elsewhere we are told that the sun and moon go around Meru in opposite directions; the moon and stars go around, dividing the month into sections.[21] Various myths link the sun to the center of the universe. Mani cites unspecified puranic sources which tell how, on one occasion, the sun wished to take a rest in the course of its revolution around Meru and asked permission to place the axle of the sun-chariot on Meru. Meru agreed. In gratitude, Sūrya blessed Meru, granting that thenceforth the mountain should be golden-colored.[22] Closely associated with Meru is the mythical lake Udaya or Anavatapta, from which by magic a shaft arises each morning, lifting up a throne for the sun at noon; in the afternoon it sinks back into the lake.[23] This motif is of course embodied in the Sarnath lion pillar, which originally upheld a stone wheel representing the sun and the divinely ordained order of things.[24] In the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa commentary we read that the sun never leaves Meru.[25] In epigraphy, Meru is described as the support of the sun.[26] Again, King Vijayasena, the eleventh-century Bengali monarch, built a temple which was compared to the mountain where the sun rests at noon.[27]

Temple architecture, heavily laden with cosmographic and cosmological symbolism, also links Meru with the sun. The temple tower, which is the central mount, has on its top the *āmalaka*, which represents the celestial world, where the sun is the pericarp in the middle of the *padmakośa*. Above the *āmalaka* is often a *stūpika*, of which part is a jar, *kalaśa*, described as the high seat or solar throne. In the *kalaśa*, the gods are merged in the deathless state.[28] As for the Buddhist *stūpa*, the ground plan of the gateways at the four cardinal points describe the claws of the *svastika*, commonly regarded as a solar symbol (the wheel of Viṣṇu).[29]

Meru was a chief point of reference for astronomical lore. The pole star was considered to stand vertically above it, linked by ropes of

[20] Mahābhārata 3.104.8782.
[21] Mahābhārata 3.163.11859 ff.
[22] See V. Mani, *Puranic Encyclopaedia* (Delhi, 1975), p. 462, s.v. "*Mahāmeru.*"
[23] See Rowland (n. 4 above), p. 70.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 14.6.44, commentary cited by S. Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (Calcutta, 1946), 1:359.
[26] *Epigraphia Indica*, 12:203, cited in Kramrisch, p. 161.
[27] Deopara Inscription, cited by Mus, *Barabudur* (n. 3 above), pp. 412, 423 ff.; and Bosch (n. 12 above), pp. 95–96.
[28] Kramrisch, 1:355.
[29] See Rowland, p. 79; and M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1899), s.v. "*svastika.*"

wind to all the heavenly bodies.[30] The same idea was known to the Ural-Altaic peoples, for whom Sumeru was Sumbu.[31] Jain literature produced an elaborate account of the movement of the heavenly bodies, postulating two suns for Jambudvīpa circling Meru in 184 orbits, some over Jambudvīpa and some over the adjacent annular ocean of salt. Great mathematical detail is given of the areas illumined by the suns, the calculation of the point of sunrise at the solstices, the varying speeds of the suns' courses, and so forth.[32] In Japan, a detailed representation of the orbits of the sun and moon and the lunar phases was based on passages from the fifth-century *Abhidharmakośa*, with Meru figuring in the plan as a square in the center.[33] Indigenous Chinese cosmological theories, on the other hand, gave special attention to astronomy but did not adopt a cosmic mountain as a point of reference. One theory, the *kai t'ien* (*gai tian*) cosmology, envisaged the heavens and the earth as two concentric domes, with the vault of heaven rotating from right to left, carrying with it the heavenly bodies, which however had an additional motion of their own.[34]

The numerous arbitrary lists of proper names—gods, mountains, trees, countries, pseudo-astronomical calculations, and so forth—which characterize the didactic literature may seem to make of Meru and its cosmological context a set of formulae like a mathematician's equations. We must remember though that Meru lived in the imagination. This is attested by its constant appearance in the literature and architecture of the Hindu-Buddhist world. Innumerable stories and legends attached themselves to it. The Mahābhārata especially abounds in evocations of the dreamlike vision of the mountain of the gods fresh, strong, and pure like a recollection of the beginning of the world. Most of the references to Meru in Sanskrit and Pali literature occur in simple similes which emphasize qualities by comparing them to Meru's, or hyperboles declaring that those qualities exceed Meru's —immensity, majesty, longevity, and above all unshakability. Since Meru is the center of the cosmos, movement is defined by reference to Mount Meru. The idea of Meru itself being moved has an air of awesome paradox which threatens the very frame of thought and imagination. Only at the end of each world age, when the serpent

[30] See Kirfel (n. 14 above), p. 15; Dimmitt and van Buitenen (n. 17 above), p. 28.
[31] P. Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters* (Chicago, 1971), p. 428.
[32] See Kirfel, p. 285.
[33] Shigeru Nakayama, *A History of Japanese Astronomy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 207 and fig. 28.
[34] J. Needham, "The Cosmology of Early China," in Blacker and Loewe, eds. (n. 7 above), pp. 87–109, esp. p. 88.

Vāsuki wakes and stretches, is Meru destroyed along with the whole of creation. Buddhism too could use the notion of Meru's destruction for dramatic effect; an illustration of King Ajātaśatru witnessing the death of the Buddha, for example, shows Meru destroyed by an earthquake in consequence of this literally world-shaking event.[35] Daniélou cites the story in which Nārada incited Vāyu, the wind, to attempt to break Meru's summit; Vāyu drummed up a great storm lasting a year, but Garuḍa protected the mountain; a renewed attack when Garuḍa was absent proved successful, and Vāyu threw the broken peak into the ocean, where it became Laṅkā.[36]

It is dynamic, alive; it represents in its vertical dimension the interchange and superimposition of different planes of being. In arguing against the inanimacy of R. von Heine-Geldern's "universism," F. D. K. Bosch surely had a point.[37]

For Bosch, the chief representative of Meru's animate dynamism, as indeed of the whole range of Hindu-Buddhist symbolism, lay in its assimilation to the cosmic tree or lotus. For some people, the attempt to press the mold of vegetal symbolism upon everything that *The Golden Germ* comports was, however impressive, a bit overdone. Nevertheless, it is striking how persistent the vegetal motifs are.

In the well-known myth, it was Mount Mandara (the eastern of Meru's four buttress mountains) that was used by the gods as a churning stick to create the world and its furniture out of the ocean of milk; but, especially in Southeast Asia, Meru often stood in for Mandara, and thereby Meru came to be assimilated to the *padmamūla* or lotus rhizoma (which is symbolically the root of creation) in that it drew up the elixir of life from the ocean of milk just as the lotus draws up water. Both Meru and *padmamūla* are represented iconographically by a jewel shape; both are golden.[38] Such parallels seem strained at first, but in context they make sense. The lotus symbolism of Meru is indeed pervasive. We have already noticed how, in temple architecture, the *āmalaka* on the tower at once caps Mount Meru and serves as lotus within which the sun is pericarp. (Literally, *āmalaka* is a type of tree.) In the *purāṇas*, Meru persistently recalls a lotus. It is the pericarp, while the four continents are the leaves, and the mountain ridges that extend from its base in four directions are like filaments from the root of a lotus.[39] The twenty mountains around

[35] See H. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia* (New York, 1955), vol. 2, pl. 612.
[36] See A. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism* (New York, 1964), pp. 91–92; cf. Mani (n. 22 above), s.v. "*Mahāmeru.*"
[37] Bosch (n. 12 above), pp. 230–31.
[38] Ibid., pp. 96–97.
[39] Viṣṇu Purāṇa 2.2.

Meru are like the filaments round the pericarp of a flower.[40] Meru is like the calyx of the lotus flower which is this earth. Viṣṇu's navel is the earth-lotus, within which Meru is the seed cup and the surrounding continents are the petals.[41] Bosch discusses in detail the symbolism of a Chinese representation of a lotus pond, a lotus in the middle of it bearing the wheel of *dharma* just as Meru bears the sun.[42] Meru's links with the cosmic pillar of the Vedas have been noticed in another article.[43] Meru is easily assimilable to the *axis mundi* and to the cosmic tree. The Deopara inscription of Vijayasena compares his temple both to the mountain where the sun rests at noon and to the trunk of the tree of which the branches are the four cardinal points and which is the support of the three worlds.[44]

We have seen how the continents identified by cosmography were named after trees. Jambudvīpa, our continent, takes its name from the rose apple (*Eugenia jambolana*). In the middle of Jambudvīpa is a big eternal Jambu tree which grants all wishes; it is a hundred *yojanas* high and touches the heavens; the juice from the fruits which fall from it performs *pradakṣiṇā* around Meru.[45] The fruits are as big as elephants, and those who drink their juice do not age; the juice is dried by the wind and the residue is gold, which is used to make ornaments for the *siddhas*.[46] Jain literature gives detailed measurements of the Jambu tree growing in Uttarakuru: its root is diamond, its trunk and branches gold, and its leaves beryl; on its branches are palaces.[47] Lake Manasarovar in Tibet is in a region known locally as the navel of Jambudvīpa; its waters are a life-giving elixir, and a divine Jambu tree grows in the center of it, according to belief.[48] The Borobudur in Java is, on several views, a Meru par excellence, and it too has been accorded a vegetal symbolism: surrounded in the growing season by a sea of green paddies, it looks like a lotus floating in a lake, and this was regarded by W. O. J. Nieuwenkamp as an important feature of its design.[49]

[40] Devībhāgavata Purāṇa 8.6.
[41] Kūrma Purāṇa 1.43.9. Cf. Dimmitt and van Buitenen, eds. (n. 17 above), p. 27.
[42] Bosch, p. 168 and pl. 54c.
[43] Mabbett (n. 13 above).
[44] Deopara Inscription, cited by Mus, *Barabudur* (n. 3 above), pp. 412, 423 ff.; and Bosch, pp. 95–96.
[45] Mahābhārata 6.7; P. C. Roy, trans. (Calcutta, 1919?–62), 5:19.
[46] Kirfel (n. 14 above), p. 94.
[47] Ibid., pp. 234–35.
[48] Anagarika Govinda, *The Way of the White Clouds* (London, 1966), p. 201.
[49] Cited by J. G. de Casparis, "The Dual Nature of Barabudur," in *Barabudur: History and Significance of a Buddhist Monument*, ed. L. O. Gómez and H. W. Woodward (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 47–84, esp. pp. 70 and 83, n. 6.

Bosch wrote: "There is a cycle of these forms, the tree, mountain, pillar and human body, ever changing into each other."[50] The temple can be any or all of them; at Khajuraho, temple, Meru, and *Puruṣa* symbolism are mutually superimposed, with the *āmalaka* representing the sun-door at the summit of Meru, the door to heaven, and the dome of the skull of the universal man, *Puruṣa*.[51] We shall come back to the symbolism of temple architecture in a moment; what matters here is that the mountain temple, the symbolic hub of the world, is superimposed on the archetypal man. Jain cosmography in its later development explicitly identified the vertical cross section of the cosmos with the *Lokapuruṣa*, made up of three stacked pyramids; the heavens are formed from his head and breast, the earth from his waist, and the subterranean worlds from the lower part of his body.[52] Bosch mentions an Old Javanese myth from the *Korowāśrama* identifying the ruler with the skull dome of the personified Mahāmeru, the brahmans with his eyes, the kṣatriyas with his neck, the vaiśyas with his torso, and the śūdras with his legs.[53] Here is a form of Tibetan meditation: before offering a sacrifice, the sacrificer is required to imagine that the trunk of his body is Mount Meru, his four major limbs are the four continents, his minor limbs are the subcontinents, his head is the *deva* worlds, his eyes are the sun and moon, and his five internal organs are the objects of wealth and enjoyment among the gods.[54]

As a god, Meru is sometimes personified. When the emperor Pṛthu made the earth a cow, to be milked by all beings to obtain their necessities, Meru milked her on behalf of the mountains.[55] In the Vāmana Purāṇa, Meru was invited along with other mountains to counsel Mount Himavant on the betrothal of Parvatī to Śiva.[56] In the Sabhā Parvan, Meru was among the mountains assembled to worship Kuvera,[57] and in the Śānti Parvan Meru presented heaps of gold to Pṛthu.[58]

The symbolism of temple architecture weaves together the themes of the world mountain, the *axis mundi*, the world tree, and other mythological motifs. In the Hindu temple, the *garbhagṛha* (adytum),

[50] Bosch, p. 151.
[51] Rowland, p. 289.
[52] L. Renou, *Religions of Ancient India* (New York, 1968), p. 130; cf. Sircar (n. 15 above), p. 46; and Gombrich (n. 8 above), pp. 130–32.
[53] Bosch, p. 152.
[54] W. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London, 1935), pp. 324–25.
[55] Mahābhārata 7.69.18; cf. Matsya Purāṇa 10.3–35.
[56] Vāmana Purāṇa 27.1–62.
[57] Mahābhārata 2.10.413.
[58] Mahābhārata 12.59.1.

"womb-house," is conceived of as a store of mystic essence which grows upward through the tower or *śikhara* ("mountain peak") above. Every detail of design is a materialization of one element in a body of metaphysical doctrine which makes of the śikhara simultaneously mountain, tree, and *puruṣa*.[59] The *garbhagṛha*, origin of the upward growth, is a secret enclosed Brahmā city.[60] *Meru* is used as a technical term to denote particular patterns of temple design, richly endowed with many-storied roofs (often with sixteen *bhūmis* or roof strata); in one categorization a *meru* has six sides, twelve *bhūmis*, several *śikharas*, many *kuharas* ("caves") and is ninety-six feet high.[61] A *Meru* is the chief and highest among twenty northern types and the foremost of thirty-two types belonging to the southern school.[62] In Bali, temples are commonly called Merus, and in East Java the slopes of the holy Mount Penanggungan are dotted with Meru temples.[63] We should not overlook the Meru symbolism unmistakably embodied in the *pañcāyatana* design—a group of five shrines, a central Meru, the *sanctum sanctorum*, with four smaller shrines around it representing the four buttress mountains which distil the energies of the four cardinal directions. This design is notable in India at Deogarh and in Cambodia at Angkor Wat.[64]

We must never lose sight of the fact that a shrine of any sort, whether or not it is explicitly assimilated to Meru, is not a mere mise en scène for the enactment of mysteries which might in principle take place anywhere. It is alive. Often its life is as an embodiment of the soul of a real human being, a deceased chieftain, ruler, dignitary, or human sacrifice, for whom his new home is regarded as a lodging in exactly the same way as was his body during his life. Nowhere is this brought out more clearly than in Paul Mus's lecture on the evolution of various forms of shrine and ritual from prehistoric earth-god cults in monsoon Asia.[65] In such cults, contact could be made with an amorphous divinity only at the shrine itself, which was a concentration of mystic energies and where alone the divinity could communicate

[59] Rowland, p. 274.
[60] Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad 5.28.38, cited by Kramrisch (n. 25 above), 1:163.
[61] Ibid., pp. 169, 191–92.
[62] Ibid., p. 277.
[63] See G. B. Milner, ed., *Natural Symbols in South East Asia* (London, 1978), frontispiece; and Wales (n. 6 above), p. 127.
[64] Nelson I. Wu, *Chinese and Indian Architecture: The City of Man, the Mountain of God and the Realm of the Immortals* (New York, 1963), p. 13.
[65] Paul Mus, "Cultes Indiens et Indigènes au Champa," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 33 (1933): 367–410, reprinted as *L'Inde vu de l'Est* (Hanoi, 1934). ed. and trans. I. W. Mabbett and D. P. Chandler as *India Seen from the East: Indian and Indigenous Cults in Champa* (Clayton, 1975).

with his devotees. Communication required a human bridge—a community chief acting as priest. These priests, after their death, returned to the soil and came to be assimilated to, indeed fused with, the territorial divinity. No clear line therefore need be drawn between a funerary monument and a shrine dedicated to a god—the soul of the deceased is a channel of communication with the otherwise remote, amorphous, and inaccessible deity, with whom the human is identified. These considerations apply with special cogency to human sacrifice. We must remember the sacrifices at Vedic altars (the soul of the dead representing Mahāpuruṣa) and beneath the foundations of great buildings. In Southeast Asia especially, the cult of the mausoleum of the dead ruler identified with the patron god survived in Hindu-Buddhist times, often attaining spectacular heights of elaborate magnificence.[66]

Clearly, a temple or shrine was not thought of as a static lifeless mass; it was a manifestation of vital energy. As Zimmer wrote, of the design of the Hindu temple: "The great form is to be thought of as precipitated from on high. It unfolds from an invisible point above the summit, pouring out of that immaterial center (*bindu*), from which the evolution of the universe as consciousness proceeds, and coming down through spheres of subtle mind stuff to the compact realm of visible-tangible forms."[67]

The *stūpa* too must be seen in this light. The shrine or cult object at which the otherwise inaccessible divinity was worshiped turned into the divinity in person. The focus was often in prehistoric times a tree or stone; it could easily become a mound or a mountain. The divinity was often identified with a deceased priest, ruler, or sacrifice, for whom the shrine was a mausoleum. The world mountain, the world tree, the shrine or temple, the human intercessor and his mausoleum are a series of mutually superimposed images that for ritual purposes were fused together in the imagination. Bosch claimed, against Mus, that the tumulus or funerary mound was merely the predecessor of the *stūpa*, not an inherently necessary factor in its evolution.[68] He wished to stress the influence upon the *stūpa* of the cosmic tree motif; but we can surely see that the funerary mound is an important ingredient in its symbolism: it is both the new body of the deceased and a point in space where, through his *nirvāṇa*, the physical plane has been ruptured, transcended. The mound, like Meru, is a vertical

[66] On Angkor, see, e.g., G. Coedès, *Pour mieux comprendre Angkor* (Paris, 1947).
[67] Zimmer (n. 35 above), 1:271.
[68] Bosch (n. 12 above), p. 169; cf. Paul Mus, "Barabudur: La Valeur cosmique du Stupa . . . ," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 33 (1933): 577–980.

shaft reaching upward into the timeless and infinite. (Compare the Jain idea that, within the structure of the universe, all those beings capable of voluntary motion are contained in a sort of shaft which passes vertically right through the center of the universe.)[69]

Upon the square base of the paradigm *stūpa* rests a dome or *aṇḍa* ("egg," recalling Brahmā's egg); it is the vault of heaven, enclosing the world mountain. The balcony or *harmikā* on the top of the dome represents the Trayastriṃśa or Tāvatiṃsa heaven of the thirty-three gods. The mast or *yaṣṭi* rising above it is the world axis extending from the waters below the world to the empyrean. It supports the "umbrellas" or *chattras* of the *devalokas*, heavens of the gods.[70] Bosch saw the *aṇḍa* as the *padmamūla* or lotus rhizoma symbol of creation, the *yaṣṭi* as the world tree, and the *chattra* as foliage.[71] (There is a Chinese view of the *stūpa* as a monk's begging bowl inverted on his folded mat with chopsticks on top, but that does not matter here.) Some recent conjectures by Hiram W. Woodward accord to the *stūpa* a double-layered Meru symbolism with buried relics representing a phenomenal and a transcendental Meru, which overlap.[72]

The Borobudur monument in Java is very likely, in some sense, a *stūpa*; but it is sui generis, and the interpretation of the veiled and elliptical symbolism of its art and architecture is a task whose complexities may never be totally unraveled.[73] The *locus classicus* for the study of it remains P. Mus's *Barabudur*;[74] Mus saw the monument as (among other things) a cosmogram, a representation of the universe. The ascent of it, which clearly may be assimilated to the ascent of Meru, is a penetration to the realm of the sacred, a "*rupture de plan*." There is not nowadays, and in the present state of knowledge there cannot be, any confident agreement about the symbolism of the successive stages of the ascent (by six square terraces and three or four circular platforms) to the summit, but it is at least generally accepted that the majestic pile has a major dimension of cosmological significance. (Others are likely to be dynastic, soteriological, and so forth.) A. Wayman sees the topmost central *stūpa* on the summit

[69] Gombrich (n. 8 above), p. 131.
[70] See Rowland (n. 4 above), pp. 78–79; Kramrisch (n. 25 above), p. 278.
[71] Bosch, p. 169.
[72] H. W. Woodward, "Barabuḍur as a Stupa," in Gómez and Woodward, eds. (n. 49 above), pp. 121–38.
[73] "Barabuḍur is a Stūpa, just as a souped-up, hoodless car with gleaming engine parts is an automobile" (ibid., p. 121).
[74] Mus, *Barabudur* (n. 3 above).

specifically as Meru.[75] J. G. de Casparis, speculating on the name itself (Indonesian Borobudur, Javanese Barabuḍur), suggests as origin for the second element *bhūdhara*, "mountain."[76] He also suggests that the Ratubaka inscription of A.D. 792 may refer to the monument when it offers homage to the Meru of the Perfect Buddhas, *samvuddhasumeru*.[77] Whatever the meaning of its parts, we should think of the Borobudur as a symbolic center of the kingdom and of the universe, whereby direct contact could be made with Buddhahood.

Insofar as a *maṇḍala* is a cosmogram, we should not overlook the function of *stūpas* in general, and the Borobudur in particular, as *maṇḍalas*. No doubt something at least of the idea of a *maṇḍala* is present in the Borobudur, though how specifically the identification was intended cannot be said with certainty. Stutterheim claimed that the monument was primarily a *maṇḍala*, but his views have been contested.[78]

B. Rowland said that a *maṇḍala* which appears in a relief on the fourth gallery, showing Vairocana in the center and four other mystic Buddhas, parallels the design of the structure as a whole: the first five terraces are a *maṇḍala* of the material world, the sixth to eighth are a *maṇḍala* of the *dharmakāya* of the Buddha, and the seventy-two stūpas which surround the topmost central Buddha represent time itself.[79] Many big *stūpas* in India conceal *maṇḍalas* in their interior: some in Andhra, and notably Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, have their structure reinforced by brick walls which make *maṇḍalas* in plan.[80]

Meru, being both an ideal *stūpa* and the center of cosmic symmetry, is obviously a preeminent motif for *maṇḍala* symbolism. A *maṇḍala* demarcates sacred space (where a rupture of plane occurs). This space, says G. Tucci, "represents protection from the mysterious forces that menace the sacral purity of the spot or which threaten the psychical integrity of him who performs the ceremony; it also implies, by magical transposition, the world itself, so that when the magician or mystic stands in the centre he identifies himself with the forces that govern the universe and collects their thaumaturgical power within himself."[81]

[75] A. Wayman, "Reflections on the Theory of Barabudur as a *Maṇḍala*," in Gómez and Woodward, eds. (n. 49 above), pp. 139–72.
[76] De Casparis (n. 49 above), p. 64.
[77] Ibid., pp. 69–70.
[78] W. F. Stutterheim, "Is Tjaṇḍi Baraboeḍoer een Maṇḍala?" *Djâwa* 13 (1933): 233–37, cited by de Casparis.
[79] Rowland (n. 4 above), p. 458.
[80] Ibid., p. 79.
[81] G. Tucci, *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala*, trans. A. H. Brodrich (London, 1961), p. 23.

Not surprisingly, Meru, known as Ri Rab Chun-po ("Excellent Mountain"),[82] is a common *maṇḍala* motif in Tibet, where it is shown surrounded by the four quarters, the continents, and seas.[83] Almost any symbolic representation that is ritually effective may count as a *maṇḍala*—it need not be a pictorial design on a plane surface—and R. Ekvall tells us that the simplest form of *maṇḍala* is made by interlacing the fingers, palms up, with the third fingers pointing upward back to back: they represent Mount Meru.[84] Another form of *maṇḍala* used to be made every day in monasteries: a dole of rice, representing Meru, would be offered to the Buddha in an elaborate ritual as an oblation of the whole world.[85]

Meru *maṇḍalas* were well known in Japan, too. In the Hoshi *maṇḍala*, the Buddha in the center sits on Meru (represented as a lotus); in the inner circle are deities of the stars, sun, moon, and planets; in the middle circle are the twelve houses of the zodiac; and in the outer circle are the twenty-eight mansions (*nakṣatras*).[86]

In Tantra, of course, the term *Meru* came to have a special sense as the worshiper's (mystically conceived) spine, a channel of psychic energies. We noticed before the form of *maṇḍala* constituted by the body, with the trunk as Meru. In tantric meditation, the *meru* is the median canal running upward from the perineum to the space above the head. At the base of the spine sleeps Kuṇḍalinī, the serpent goddess personifying energy, in the form of a coiled serpent. The awakening of Kuṇḍalinī in meditation causes her to rise up through the *meru* channel to the highest of the seven *chakras* or planes, where the union of Śiva and Śakti finally takes place; this mediates the liberation of the worshiper from the bondage of *samsāra*.[87]

The symbolism is complex. The self of the worshiper is Meru, which is the world mountain and also the cosmic tree (*merudaṇḍa*) and a *stūpa*. The space above his skull, the *brahmarandhra*, is regarded as infinite and represents *nirvāṇa*; this is obviously cognate with the realms above Mount Meru, which ascend by stages through the *devalokas* to the realms of formlessness, void, and *nirvāṇa*.

There is a neat parallel between the tantric union of Śiva with Śakti and a Cambodian ritual reported by the thirteenth-century Chinese

[82] A. Grünwedel, *Mythologie des Buddhismus in Tibet und der Mongolei* (Osnabrück, 1970), p. 180.

[83] R. Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet: Patterns and Function* (Chicago, 1964), p. 177.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Waddell (n. 19 above), p. 398.

[86] Nakayama (n. 33 above), p. 207.

[87] See Tucci, pp. 108–9; M. Stutley and J. Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (London, 1977), s.v. "Kuṇḍalinī."

traveler Chou Ta-kuan. At night, the king would ascend to the top of the Phimeanakas, a pyramidal monument, and wait to be visited for cohabitation by a serpent goddess, *nāgī*. The failure of the union was a portent of disaster. Bosch notes a further close parallel from the Javanese *Surakartakraton*.[88]

The ambiguities and multivalences of symbolism which are exhibited by temple and *stūpa* architecture, *maṇḍalas* and tantric ritual, make clear to us a duality in Mount Meru's nature that could never emerge from the contemplation of it merely as a point on a two-dimensional map, even a cosmic map. For the cosmic map represents only space "out there"—even if the data of cosmography, with its elephant-sized jambu fruits and circumambulating rivers, are invisible to the fleshly eye (so are molecules and magnetic fields), still they are regarded as concrete and physical in a very real sense. The principles of Meru-centric cosmography are continuous with what its authors regarded as hard objective science. As Craig Reynolds wrote, in his discussion of the Thai *Traibhūmikathā*, "*Karma* thus gives order and regularity to the physical universe. In its own way, the cosmography was a scientific textbook—explaining planetary motion and the recurrence of the seasons, and covering such subjects as geography, biology and meteorology."[89]

But this is only one aspect of Meru. It is not only the point of reference for cosmography, for "outer" space. In its vertical extension, it points to the empyrean where outer space is transcended; so is outer time. By pointing upward it points to inner space, where Meru becomes *puruṣa*, becomes self, becomes the shaft by which one rises to salvation. Therefore, in another sense, Meru and all that goes with it are not only physics but metaphysics, beyond the possibility of concrete objective prehension. As the Vāyu Purāṇa says: "I shall explain the seven continents along with the moon, the sun and the planets, of which men by their philosophy declare the measures; but those entities which cannot be imagined one may not apprehend by philosophy; what transcends nature should be taken for granted."[90]

Kingship is another term which alternates with self or *puruṣa*, cosmic tree, and world mountain as a symbol of ascent through higher planes to the timeless and infinite. Let us first recall the

[88] See P. Pelliot, "Memoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge, par Tcheou Ta-kouan," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 2 (1902): 144–45; and Bosch (n. 12 above), p. 92.

[89] C. J. Reynolds, "Buddhist Cosmography in Thai History, with Special Reference to Nineteenth-Century Culture Change," *Journal of Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (1976): 203–20, esp. 209.

[90] Vāyu Purāṇa 34.7–8. The last clause is not clear to me; in it I have followed the translation of Sircar (n. 15 above), p. 36.

graphic though fictitious Han Chinese explanation of the character for king, *wang* 王. Three horizontal lines represent the three worlds, heaven at the top. The vertical line is the one link between them—the person of the ruler. He stands at the junction between cosmos and society. The similarity to the Indian idea needs no spelling out.

Like Meru, the ruler stands at the center of society; everything is defined by reference to him. Around him (as around Meru) the rest of the world moves; he is immovable. The largely Buddhist idea of *cakravartin*, "wheel turner"—the ideal world emperor who by his karma sets in motion all the laws by which the world is governed—echoes this theme.

Like the king, the self (*ātman* or *ahaṃkāra*) of the aspirant to salvation stands poised between the physical world out there and the mystic inner space in here where distinctions between subject and object are obliterated. Kingship, as Michel Hulin's recent study[91] reminds us, is an important symbol of the self.

The king, his palace, his central shrine, and his capital city therefore belong to the same cycle of equivalences as does Meru. In a sense, the ruler is Meru. Therefore it is fitting that a temple of the *Meru* class—"Meru, the lord of prasādas"—should be built, as the *Samarāṅgaṇa-sūtradhāra* tells us, only by a kṣatriya.[92] The center of the kingdom, said Bosch, is equivalent to the *padmamūla* (symbol of creation) and to the cosmic tree; it is the place where Meru rises, and there should be four main roads radiating from it to the cardinal points to materialize the cosmographic symmetry of Meru.[93] Akbar, in his Diwan-i-khas at Fatehpur Sikri, sat atop the column of the lotus mountain, with his four chief ministers in attendance symmetrically at their respective corners.[94]

This symbolism did not begin, or end, in India. In ancient Mesopotamia, the royal throne was identified with the *axis mundi*, the pole star, and the world mountain.[95] In Burma, too, it was the royal throne rather than the central cult shrine that marked the center of the cosmos. The coronation hall was known as Indra's palace: the king was Meru, surrounded by eight Brahmans who were the eight

[91] M. Hulin, *Le Principe de l'ego dans la pensée indienne classique: La Notion d'ahamkara* (Paris, 1978).

[92] *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra* 56.35, cited by Kramrisch (n. 25 above), p. 143, n. 42.

[93] Bosch (n. 12 above).

[94] H. L. Shorto, "The Planets, the Days of the Week and Points of the Compass: Orientation Symbolism in Burma," in *Natural Symbols in South-East Asia*, ed. G. B. Milner (London, 1978), pp. 152–64, esp. p. 162.

[95] Tucci (n. 81 above), pp. 24–25.

lokapālas (divine guardians of the points of the compass); there were four maids of honor for the quarters. He had four chief ministers, four officials assigned to sides of the palace, four undersecretaries of state, eight assistant secretaries, and so on.[96]

In other parts of Southeast Asia, Meru symbolism was ubiquitously embodied in the cosmographic symmetry of the state administration, as R. von Heine-Geldern's classic study, just cited, makes quite clear. The division of government and kingdom into categories numbering four, eight, or thirty-two everywhere betokened a preoccupation with the magic of ritual orientation to the compass rather than with practical convenience. In Cambodia and Java there were four chief ministers; in Cambodia they were called the four pillars. In ninth-century Java there were twenty-eight provinces (representing the twenty-eight *nakṣatras*) and four ministers. In fourteenth-century Pegu, there were thirty-two provinces.[97]

In much of Southeast Asia, royal legitimacy was sanctified in great measure by the construction of an impressive shrine, rather than a secular palace, as a symbolic Meru and ritual center of the kingdom. The assimilation of ruler to Meru was represented in various ways, especially by the deposition of his ashes and relics in a container placed beneath the floor of the adytum of the central shrine; this practice is well attested for Java,[98] and of course for Cambodia, which is served by a considerable literature.[99] Portrait statues of rulers were sometimes erected to represent patron deities. Symbolically, of course, such practices identify the king with a god. This can be misconstrued to have practical implications for political and social history, which it did not. H. Kulke argues that the famous *devarāja* cult of Angkor did not *eo ipso* divinize the Angkorian monarchs, for the term *devarāja* qualified Śiva as king of the gods, not the earthly ruler as god-king;[100] the symbolic assimilation was nevertheless made but should be seen as a necessity of ritual, not a program for despotism. There is no need to pursue the subject further here.[101]

[96] Von Heine-Geldern, "Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia" (n. 5 above), pp. 15–30.

[97] Ibid., p. 20; cf. H. L. Shorto, "The 32 *myos* in the Medieval Mon Kingdom," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26 (1963): 572–91.

[98] See, e.g., Wales (n. 6 above), p. 127.

[99] See, particularly, Coedès (n. 66 above).

[100] H. Kulke, "Der Devaraja-Kult," *Saeculum* 25, no. 1 (1974): 24–55; cf. J. Filliozat, "New Researches on the Relations between India and Cambodia," *Indica* 3 (1966): 95–106, and "Sur la Çivaisme et le Bouddhisme du Cambodge, à propos de deux livres récents," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 70 (1981): 59–99.

[101] See I. W. Mabbett, "Devarāja," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no. 2 (1969): 202–23.

The architecture of the pyramidal shrines of Angkor is particularly rich in cosmological symbolism. For example, the Bakheng is molded to the summit of a natural hill; on top is the central shrine flanked by four subordinate ones like Meru's buttress mountains. The terraces of the pyramid are studded with smaller shrines, so that the total number, including the five of the summit, is 109. The central adytum represents the polar axis, and the other 108 around it represent the four phases of the moon multiplied by the twenty-seven *nakṣatras* (lists of twenty-seven as well as of twenty-eight were known), thus materializing the cosmic cycle. All these towers were so arranged that the spectator approaching from any of the cardinal points would be able to see just thirty-three of them—the gods on Meru. This at least is the interpretation of J. Filliozat.[102]

The later Cambodian ruler Udayādityavarman II had it written that, "because he was aware that the centre of the universe was distinguished by Meru, he considered it appropriate that there should be a Meru in the centre of his own capital." Therefore a Śiva *liṅga* was erected.[103]

Jayavarman VII's capital city of Angkor Thom, with the Bayon shrine exactly at its center, is especially loaded with mythical references. The city is surrounded by a rectangular wall, with gateways at the cardinal points approached by causeways over the moat (or cosmic ocean); the causeways are bordered by great balustrades representing the serpent Vāsuki held, as in a tug-of-war, by gods on one side and demons on the other. Here clearly is the creation myth of the churning of the ocean of milk, with the Bayon, at the midpoint between opposite gateways, assimilated to Mount Mandara. In Southeast Asia, Mandara is sometimes interchangeable with Meru. The five topmost shrines of the Bayon are Meru's peaks, and forty-four smaller shrines represent the provinces of the empire. Statues of the deities of all the districts and provinces were assembled in the Bayon's galleries, representing the absorption of the sacred energies of the imperial territory into the majesty of Jayavarman's patron *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara, ubiquitously sculpted on the tower tops, his four faces symbolizing infinity.[104]

[102] J. Filliozat, "Le Symbolisme du monument de Phnom Bakheng," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 44, pt. 2 (1954): 527–54.

[103] See Wheatley (n. 31 above), p. 437; cf. von Heine-Geldern, "Conceptions . . . ," p. 18.

[104] See, among others, Paul Mus, "Angkor at the Time of Jayavarman VII," *Indian Art and Letters* 11 (1937): 65–75, and "Le Symbolisme à Angkor Thom: Le 'Grand Miracle' du Bayon," *Comptes Rendus, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 64 (January–March 1936): 57–68; Rowland (n. 4 above), pp. 411–12; Wheatley, p. 438; Coedès (n. 66 above).

The myth of the union of the Cambodian ruler with a kuṇḍalinī-like serpent goddess on top of another pyramidal monument has already been noted. The idea that royal power was derived from mystic energies welling from a point of transcendence on the world mountain persisted into the present century. A coronation document dating from 1906 in Cambodia declares that the king is Meru; his right eye is the sun and his left the moon.[105] C. J. Reynolds, writing about social change in modern Thailand, argues that there was an intimate link between cosmology and kingship—the Buddhist *Trai-bhūmi* cosmography lost its influence when, and only when, the monarchy itself was demythologized.[106]

We have come a long way, from Babylon to Indochina, from the mists of prehistory to the nineteenth century. But the correspondences between the stages along the way are not the product of piecemeal cultural transmission alone, like bales of hay pitchforked from one culture to another; they are the product, just as much, of the exigencies of similar social environments calling forth similar cosmologies. A cosmology is not an adventitious assemblage of beliefs; it is an integrated whole. Its at least presumptive unity is a condition of thought about the world in which we live. It is not an alternative to religion but a vocabulary for the phenomenal, an ordering of the reality of what we see; it offers physics (modern science is a cosmology), while religion may offer metaphysics. As a language of culture, the Meru-centered cosmology spread wherever indigenous notions of sacred space, cosmic centrality, and rupture of plane lent themselves to the adoption of it as a vehicle of high culture. We have seen some of the reasons for its extraordinary contagiousness.

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[105] Von Heine-Geldern, "Conceptions . . . ," pp. 21–22.
[106] Reynolds (n. 89 above), p. 217.